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EAST TIMOR DEVELOPMENTS

Member of European Parliamentary Delegation Visits East Timor

During a recent visit of the European Parliamentary Delegation to the ASEAN Interparliamentary Organization, a member of the Delegation, Mr. J. Van Raay, paid a visit to East Timor. What follows is an unofficial transcript of an interview with Mr. Van Raay conducted by Reuters and ANTARA news agencies upon his departure from Soekarno-Hatta Airport on February 1, 1988 :

Van Raay : This visit is part of our (European Parliamentary) visit to Kuala Lumpur to meet with the AIPO delegation - the ASEAN Interparliamentary Organization. While the others are continuing on to the Philippines and South Korea, I have used the opportunity to make a special trip to Indonesia because we are interested in the situation of East Timor, specifically it is our problem too. So I wanted to have a look for myself at the situation there. And if you ask my impressions, they are quite clear, I went by helicopter all over that part of the island and the situation there is completely normal. In other words, as far as I'm concerned, there is no military/security problem. I can say so because I could see it.

In the second place, we had a very satisfactory talk with the Governor and he took a long time to discuss with me the situation, the influence of the East Timorese and the local government. And I'm satisfied that, let's say, 80 percent or so of Timorese civil servants are from East Timor. Furthermore, going by helicopter all over the island, we got in touch with the local population. Since the young ones already speak bahasa, I was able to meet and hear from 12 to 18 year olds or maybe 20. I speak bahasa a little bit, sedikit-sedikit, so I could speak directly with the people there and again the situation appears to be normal and prosperous.

Antara : *Did you meet the priests or pastors there ?*

Van Raay : It is good you ask that question. Sunday morning we flew around everywhere and what surprised me was that churches were overcrowded, the people could not get in. It happened to be the hundredth anniversary of the death of Don Bosco.
I know quite a lot of Catholic priests of that Order, the Selesian Order. So as a matter of fact you could see with your own eyes that there is complete freedom of religion. The people use the opportunity to go to church.

Reuters : *What is the real purpose of your visit to East Timor ?*

Van Raay : The real purpose of the visit to East Timor is this: at the moment there is a political matter pending before the European Parliament, whether, let's say in 1974, 1975, 1976, in the old colony of Portugal the people of East Timor had sufficient means to express their own will. So that is a political matter, whether or not the right to self-determination has been respected. That's point one. Point two - is there still a situation, let's say, of civil war and is Fretilin continuing its fight as guerillas in El Salvador, to give an example, in Nicaragua, or is that over ?
You see, the matter of self-determination of course is in the first place a completely political matter with difficult and complicated legal issues, if you view it before the international fora. The majority of the countries in the world, at this moment, obviously accept the sovereignty of Indonesia over East Timor. The legal difficulty was that we Dutchmen transferred sovereignty in 1949 that was, of course, with regard to the old, former colony Netherlands East Indies which did not include East Timor. I talked with Minister Supardjo and other gentlemen from Indonesia that the Dutch in the 17th century could have pushed a little bit further.

Antara : ***Now after you have seen the situation in East Timor, do you believe there are still abuses of human rights there ?***

Van Raay : No, absolutely not. There's no abuse of human rights but I'm referring to a legal question not a human rights question.

Reuters : *So you will bring up this situation in East Timor at the parliamentary session ?*

Van Raay : Absolutely, and what will be more, I shall tell them that the International Committee of the Red Cross, if you are referring to the human rights situation, which is not the same as the legal situation, with regard to the human rights situation, the Red Cross is allowed to visit the prisons when it wishes to do so and it can report regularly to the proper Indonesian authorities and check for results.
So that situation looks clear to me but that was not my main interest.

Reuter ; *In the European Parliament I believe Portugal has its representatives.*

Van Raay : Of course, we have in my political party colleagues from Portugal.

Reuter : ..... *and I believe they will condemn or they will say something negative about East Timor, what do you want to do there now ?*

Van Raay : Well, I understand the feelings of the Portuguese, because we in the Netherlands had exactly the same difficult feelings after 1949. They, in the first place, changed in one day after an unbelievably strict dictatorship in Portugal which considered East Timor as a part of Portugal, and the population had no rights at all to form political parties and they didn't have the chance for a certain period of transition. The next day they declared that all colonies would become independent and then came the problem of Portugal itself.
So I have an understanding that the Portuguese government of today has difficulties, which were also with the predecessor, which really cannot help very much. And in the second place, it is a legal Portuguese problem that the Constitution from that time does not allow them much freedom of action. So what one really should do is understand their problem and realize the feelings of the government toward the people here in East Timor, and recognise the historical imperative that Indonesia and Portugal together should negotiate to find a solution for this.
But as far as I'm concerned, and it's my concern now, the situation with regard to East Timor being the 27th province, is irreversible. So

one should concentrate on human rights if people are concerned about human rights. That's legitimate if the Portuguese are concerned about human rights. They should send a delegation. I was alone, they can send more people and see for themselves.

Reuters : ***Are you going to talk about this situation in East Timor with the delegation from the Portuguese Parliament ?***

Van Raay : Of course, I have four colleagues in my own Christian Democratic Group. I'll see them the day after tomorrow. The first thing, I'll go to them and tell them, exactly the same as I told you, of our findings and recommend that they resume diplomatic relations with Indonesia as soon as possible. But what's very important is what I'm saying to them. You know they are our allies, Portugal, they are our friends and I'll never hurt their feelings which I understand.
So, you look for a way with regard to their specific role and you make it possible for them in an honourable way to resume a normal relationship.
I'll do anything that I can do to promote that. In fact, if you look into my heart I think that all of us, you know, should leave, in the first place now, the possibility between Portugal and Indonesia to resume their friendship, as we the Dutch, after many difficult years, resumed our friendship with Indonesia. That's of course the purpose of the whole operation and I do not intend, I want to say expressly, to in any way attack the Portuguese. I'm not intending to do that. It is a matter of explaining, friendship, invitation, telling them that I have been there. If you want to go there, go yourself. See for yourself because the Indonesians will welcome you.

Antara : ***Maybe there's something special to report from your discussion with Minister Supardjo Rustam ?***

Van Raay : I just told him the same what I told you. He was pleased about my findings. I hope to go again in December, because I didn't have the time to go to Irian Jaya and further. He said if you want to bring your Portuguese colleagues along you're welcome. And, you know, this is, I think, the tone and the method of the friendly way and not the conflicting way to try to solve this problem.